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HAUNTED TALES

THE SCARIEST GHOST STORIES

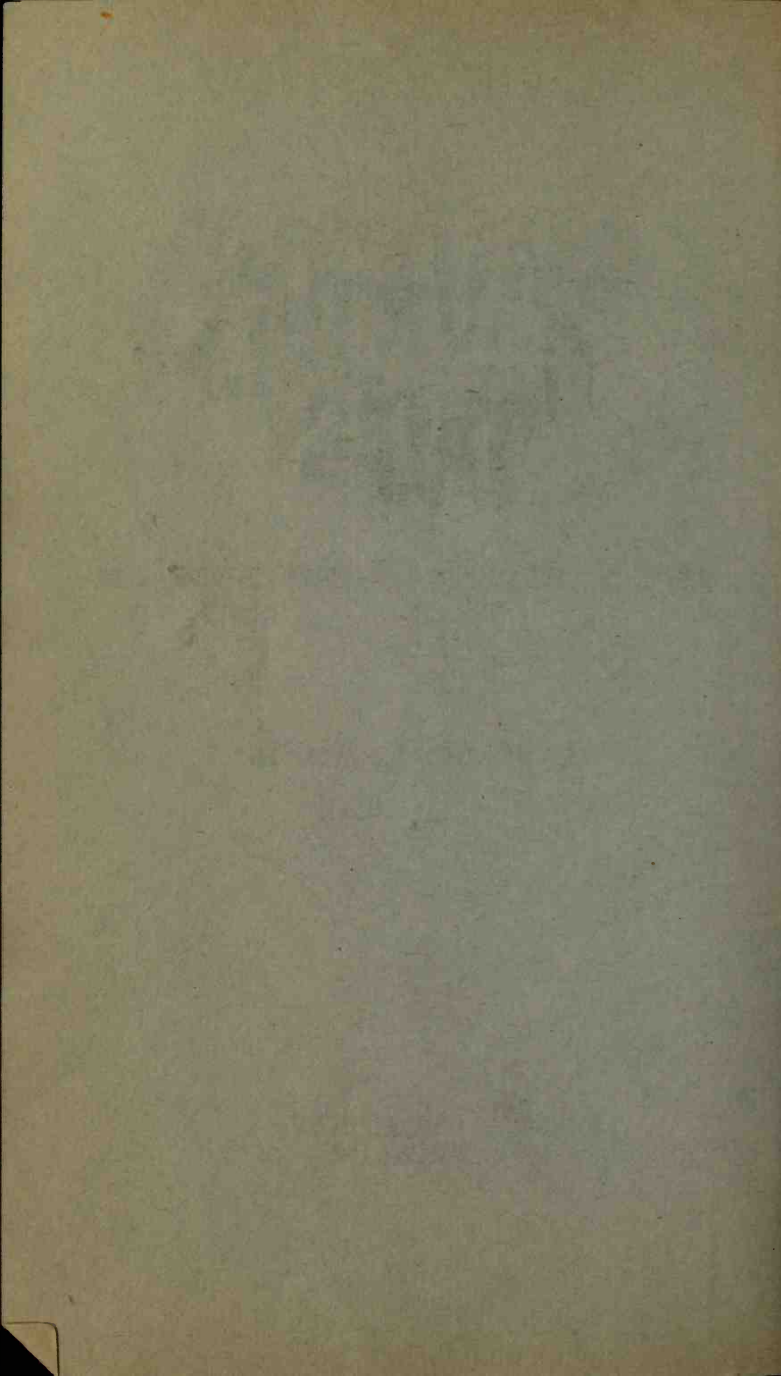


by Nancy E. Krulik

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The Scariest Ghost Stories

by Nancy E. Krulik



**For Danny, who holds my hand at
the scary parts.**

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CONTENTS

GIVE ME MY GOLD	1
DREAM SPELL	8
THE CRAZED CAMPER	25
THE REFLECTION	37
THE SHIP IN THE BOTTLE	46
THE WEDDING FEAST	54
THE CRY OF THE CAT	63



GIVE ME MY GOLD

No one in Jenkinsville was sorry to hear that old Eddie Barnes had died. Not that they were happy, mind you. It's just that Eddie Barnes was not an especially likable old man. Actually, he was kind of crotchety and very stingy. It was no secret that he was the richest person in town—maybe even a millionaire! But you'd never know it.

He lived all alone at the top of the hill, in a house as big as a mansion. The place looked more like an abandoned junkyard, though,

with badly chipped paint, cracked windows, and overgrown weeds in the front yard. "How could he let the place get so run-down?" wondered the townspeople. But no one had the guts to approach him.

On his rare visits to town, Eddie Barnes would walk down the street in torn, dirty clothes, scowling at everyone in his path. "He doesn't *look* like a millionaire," the townspeople would think to themselves. And, as if he could read their minds, Eddie Barnes would glare at them through his one good eye—the left one. Over his right eye, he wore a raggedy old eye patch.

Why he wore the eye patch was as much a mystery as where his money came from. Naturally the kids made up stories about the old man. "I'll bet he was a pirate, and his eye was poked out in a duel over buried treasure," Joey Carlton would say. "He lost his eye but gained million dollars in gold!"

But, as wealthy as he was, Eddie Barnes never gave a penny to charity. "Charity begins at home—*my* home," he was fond of saying in his hoarse, gravelly voice. Actually, this was one of the few things he ever did say.

So, when Eddie Barnes died, people

waited impatiently to hear what he did with his money in his will. He had no children or family to leave it to, and knowing how Eddie felt about charity . . .

The town hall was filled with people on the afternoon Judge Olshan read Eddie's will. "I, Eddie Barnes, being of sound mind and body," the judge read slowly to the silent, waiting crowd, "do hereby state that I will taking my wealth with me to the great beyond. Ha ha, suckers!"

The crowd gasped. Taking it with him! Why, that stingy old man! What about the poor orphans who needed clothes? Or the school that desperately needed a new furnace? But who were they to argue?

Everyone left the hall unhappy—that is, everyone except John Vining, the undertaker. John, who wasn't exactly an honest man, had an idea. He wanted to collect the old man's riches for himself and came up with a plan to do so. He would sneak the riches out of Eddie's coffin that night, before it was buried the next day. Who would ever know that Eddie Barnes had been buried a poor man instead of a rich one?

That night, John let himself into the room

where the coffin lay. Quietly, he lit a single candle and walked over to the open coffin. He could have sworn he had closed it earlier, but there was no time to worry about that now. He had much more important business to take care of.

He stared down at Eddie's body and felt a shiver run through his own. The funeral home's makeup artist had done such a flawless job that Eddie looked almost as if he were still alive. "You're just a dead man," John mumbled nervously as he began to search through the coffin for Eddie's riches. "Finders keepers, I always say."

With nimble fingers, John searched the pockets of the dead man's clothes. Nothing. He searched the lining of Eddie's coat. No jewels, no coins.

They must be here somewhere, he thought. Then it hit him! The eye patch! But as he reached for the eye patch, John felt icy, stiff fingers grab at his wrist.

"AHHHHH!" John screamed as he struggled to free his hand. But when he looked down, he saw that it was only his sleeve that had caught on one of Eddie's fingers. I must have imagined that the hand

grabbed me, he told himself.

Once again, he reached down and this time, fingered the small black, ragged piece of cloth that covered the dead man's eye. Taking a deep breath, he lifted it, and there, just as he had expected, was a shiny, thick, gold piece! Without a second thought, John grabbed the gold piece and replaced the eye patch. "You won't miss this where you're going, old Eddie boy," John snarled, pocketing the precious gold piece. Then he quickly shut the coffin, blew out the candle, and ran out into the night.

When he got home, John hid his new treasure beneath his mattress and fell into a sound sleep. But not for long. Only an hour later, he was awakened by a soft moaning. Sitting up abruptly, he strained his ears to make out where the sound was coming from. "Give me my gold! Give me my gold!" moaned a gravelly old voice.

"Who's there?" John timidly demanded into the darkness.

"Give me my gold! Give me my gold!" the voice commanded again, louder this time. It seemed to be coming from the closet.

John jumped out of bed and grabbed the

poker from his bedside fireplace. As he prepared to defend himself, he shakily opened the closet door. But what he saw in the closet paralyzed him with fright! There, floating in the darkness, were hundreds of piercing eyeballs, all glowing threateningly and staring directly at him!

Terrified, John slammed the closet door. He jumped back into bed, hoping to find that this was only a dream. But it was no use. Now the eyes were everywhere—floating near the ceiling, rolling around on the floor, glaring out from under the bed, and even hiding under John's pillow! And not one eye even blinked! They just stared menacingly at him from all corners of the darkness. From behind the eyes came the same gravelly cry: "Give me my gold! Give me my gold!" John sat trembling and shaking with his hands over his own eyes, on the island of his bed.

"Give me my gold! Give me my gold!" the voice cried as the eyes danced around the room. "Give me my gold! Give me my gold!"

Then everything was silent. John slowly uncovered his eyes and found that every last eye had disappeared. But, as exhausted as he was, it took quite awhile before he was able to

get back to sleep.

The next morning, John woke in a cold sweat. As he looked around his sunny room, he knew what he had to do. He grabbed the gold piece from underneath his mattress, put on his heavy overcoat, and drove out to the cemetery.

When he reached Eddie Barnes's grave site, John dug through the fresh red soil with his bare hands until he reached the coffin. With bleeding hands, he tugged open the coffin and felt around for the eye patch. But there was no eye patch! There was no Eddie Barnes, either! The coffin was empty! How can I possibly return this gold piece to a dead man who isn't even here?

Then he smiled. I *can't* return it, he realized. It's mine! With a sigh of relief, he got up and headed toward his car—so excited that he forgot to close and bury the coffin. But he had gotten no further than two steps when he felt cold, bony fingers grasp him around his neck. And as the fingers squeezed the last breath out of John Vining, a cry shot out into the night:

"I TOLD YOU TO GIVE ME MY GOLD!"



DREAM SPELL

Smoke filled Melinda Singer's eyes. She wanted desperately to rub them and clear them of the burning and itching. But her hands were tied too tightly behind her back. She cringed as she felt the heat of the fire crawling dangerously close to her feet, but she was powerless to move from her position. She let out a loud, powerful yell as the flames burned her soles.

"FREE ME!" Melinda yelled to the crowd that had gathered to watch the burning. "I am

innocent!"

No one in the crowd moved. No one would untie the girl from the stake. They all watched her through the glowing flames as an old woman chanted, "Burn, sinner, burn! Burn! Burn! Burn!"

The flames rose up Melinda's legs. "AAHHHH!" She screamed as the pain grew too much to bear. She could hear the crackling noise and smell the stench of her burned flesh. She wished she could be consumed by the fire—she would rather die at once than endure the slow pain of burning at the stake.

"Melinda, Melinda, wake up! You're having a nightmare." Melinda opened her eyes cautiously—only to find her sister Samantha staring down at her.

"It must have been some dream," Samantha was saying. "You were really shouting!" But then Samantha looked down and gasped. Her sister's feet and calves were covered with terrible blisters.

Melinda closed her eyes tight. A dream? It couldn't have been a dream. If it were only a dream, why did her legs still hurt so badly?

* * *

At the same time on the other side of town, Jeffrey Michaels's mother ran panic-stricken into her son's room.

Jeffrey was screaming in his sleep. "FREE ME! FREE ME! FREE ME!" he cried.

When Mrs. Michaels entered the room, she saw her son thrashing in his bed, his hands gripped tightly around his own neck.

"Jeffrey, wake up, wake up. It's only a dream!" She shook her son gently, trying to free him from his nightmare.

Jeffrey sat up, opened his mouth, and gasped for air. He could barely breathe.

"Th...th...thank you..." he gasped, the words barely brushing past his lips. "Y... you saved my life," he gulped.

"Nonsense, Jeffrey, it was only a bad dream," his mother said.

"It seemed so real," Jeffrey muttered. "Honest, Mom. They wanted to kill me. They had me hanging from a noose. I could feel the rope around my neck. It was getting tighter and tighter—so tight I could barely breathe! I could feel my windpipe being blocked off. And my fingers...I was losing all feeling in my fingers. My eyes couldn't focus. I still feel a little blurry.

"I tried to yell, to tell them that I was innocent, but I wasn't sure what I had been convicted of. After a while, I couldn't scream anymore. And there was an old woman there who just kept cackling and yelling, 'Hang him high! Hang him high!'"

Mrs. Michaels put her arms around her son's neck to comfort him. Then it was her turn to scream in horror. There, right before her eyes, she could see welts on her boy's neck! Or were they rope burns?

* * *

Mrs. Michaels wasn't the only parent who had to deal with an emergency at sunrise that day. At the same moment that Melinda and Jeffrey were having those horrible dreams, Mrs. Adams, who lived clear across town, heard a loud, painful scream coming from the next bedroom. It was followed by a hollow, dull thud. Mrs. Adams shook with fright. She was a widow and lived with her teenage son Daniel. She was sure there was a prowler in her house.

The noise came from Daniel's room. She ran into the room. But there, instead of a prowler, she saw her son lying on the floor,

completely still, the color drained from his face.

She ran to the boy. She put her ear to his heart. It was beating, but the boy's breath was short and shallow. Immediately she dialed 911.

"Send an ambulance to 307 Surrey Lane right away," she told the operator. Then she hung up the phone and held her son's hand until the ambulance arrived.

* * *

By the time Mrs. Adams and Daniel arrived at the hospital, the boy was conscious and his breathing stronger. As he examined Daniel, Dr. Holt asked what had happened.

"It was the strangest thing, Doc," Daniel said slowly. "I was fast asleep. Then, just as the sunlight started coming in my window, I felt a heavy weight, like someone sitting on my chest. But when I looked down, it wasn't a person, it was a rock the size of a boulder. I tried to push it off. It hurt like anything. But before I could, another one was piled on top of the first. The weight was crushing my ribs. I could hear them cracking. I screamed for her to stop, but she wouldn't. She just kept add-

ing stones and screaming, 'More pain . . . more pain . . . You must suffer for what you have done.' Then I must have blacked out or something, because I woke up here."

"She? Who was putting the stones on you, Danny?" Dr. Holt asked gently.

"I've never seen her before, Doc, honest. Just some old woman. Strange thing, though. She had supernatural strength. I can't figure out how an old woman could lift those rocks!"

"My poor boy's obviously upset," Mrs. Adams said to the doctor. "His story makes no sense."

"Maybe not, Mrs. Adams," Dr. Holt replied. "But he has three broken ribs."

Dr. Holt left the boy to rest in an examination room. When he got back to his office, he found Melinda Singer waiting for him with her parents. Melinda's feet and calves were covered with terrible blisters and her expression showed the pain she was feeling. "Melinda woke up screaming something about being burned at the stake," her father told the doctor. Dr. Holt looked at the wounds and then treated Melinda for second-degree

burns. He left her to rest in an examination room.

Soon, Jeffrey Michaels and his mother arrived. "Jeffrey woke up with the strangest wounds on his neck," Mrs. Michaels said. "He could swear someone had been trying to hang him. In his dream, an old lady was shouting at him, too.

Dr. Holt was baffled. Three children, all with serious injuries, were reporting that they had been victims of horrible tortures. It didn't make sense.

Alone in his office, Dr. Holt studied the charts of his three patients. They all had such different injuries. Yet their stories all had the same theme—an old woman trying to kill them said they were guilty of a crime. But what crime could these three have committed? Daniel was an honor student at the high school. And Jeffrey came from such a good family. The Michaelses were one of the first families to settle in Massachusetts. They'd come in the 1600s on the same ship as Dr. Holt's family. Come to think of it, the Singer and the Adams families had been part of that group of families, too. These kids came from

fine, upstanding New England homes. They couldn't be guilty of anything.

Still, the whole mess had an eerie quality about it. Three kids from respected families were tortured almost to death by an old woman at sunrise on the same day. . . .

The doctor sat up straight. He had a gnawing feeling in his stomach. The children's descriptions of what had happened rang a bell. Something his grandmother had told him—an old family secret. Dr. Holt looked at his calendar. The date read October 22.

Dr. Holt's mind raced. October 22. Singer, Adams, Michaels. Sunrise. Burning. Hanging. Stoning.

"Oh, my goodness!" the doctor shouted. "It's Ruth Orden!"

Dr. Holt called the three patients and their parents into his office. He sat behind his desk and stared at them. How could he tell them the truth about what had happened last night? Would they believe him—he barely believed it himself.

"Have you ever heard of a woman named Ruth Orden?" Dr. Holt asked.

The families looked at each other. Ruth

Orden? Nobody knew a Ruth Orden.

Finally, Daniel's mother asked, "Who is this Ruth Orden? And what does she have to do with my boy?"

"Not is, Mrs. Adams," Dr. Holt said. "Was. Ruth Orden was a lonely old woman who lived in this town three hundred years ago. My grandmother used to tell me stories about her. She died on October twenty-second, today's date. And I am afraid that she is after your children for revenge!"

Melinda Singer's eyes grew wide with fear. "Revenge," she said slowly. "What did I do?"

Dr. Holt smiled gently. "Oh, it's nothing you did, my dear. Ruth's spirit is still angry about something that happened three hundred years ago."

"Three hundred years is a long time to be angry," Melinda said solemnly.

"A long time to you and me," the doctor answered quietly. "But spirits like Ruth can hold a grudge for eternity—if they have something to be angry about. And Ruth sure had something to be angry about."

The doctor sat back in his chair and stared at the group before him. "It all started

with three mischievous girls three hundred years ago. Back then this town was pretty quiet—the people who lived here did not believe in a whole lot of rejoicing. No dancing, laughing, or joke telling was allowed. Well, you can imagine how bored the young people could get.

“To find a little excitement, three young girls formed a club. They called it the Haunting Club. Now, everyone knew witchcraft was punishable by death, so the girls didn’t actually practice any magic. No, these girls played a more earthly game. Late at night, while the people of the town were asleep, they would sneak into the homes of their neighbors and move the furniture, turn the rugs, or put out the fire. Then they would quietly sneak back into their own houses and go to sleep. The next morning, the neighbors would see the furniture moved or the fire dead, and they would be sure that their houses were haunted!

“The three girls had a great time laughing at the foolishness of their neighbors. Imagine anyone really believing in ghosts!?

“It was mid-October when the girls decided to play their creeping-spirits trick on

Ruth Orden. Ruth was old and a bit eccentric. She lived with three cats. She cooked all her meals outside over an open fire. Ruth's house was off by itself on the edge of a forest. It was a big house, and Ruth had sort of stopped caring for it after her husband Jebediah had died. Ruth didn't much like people, and she certainly didn't like them crossing her land. So she didn't have many friends. She was the perfect victim for the Haunting Club.

"At precisely eleven o'clock on October fifteenth, the three girls in the Haunting Club gathered in the center of town. Moving with quick, silent steps, they made their way to Ruth's house. The girls headed for a window. Gently the first girl climbed through the window, tiptoed over to the door, and opened it—allowing her two partners to enter the house.

"But there was one hitch in their plan—Ruth Orden was awake! Now that she was getting on in years, Ruth had trouble sleeping. Sometimes she enjoyed sitting quietly in the dark until she fell asleep in her rocking chair. On that night, she had not fallen asleep.

"Ruth was just protecting what was hers when she grabbed a frying pan and swung

and hit one of the girls in the head. There was a terrible thud as the unconscious girl hit the floor. Terrified, the two girls dragged their friend out of the house and carried her to the doctor's house.

"Luckily, the injured girl survived. But all three girls were in a lot of trouble for sneaking away after dark. So, to avoid punishment, the very next evening, the three girls went in front of the town council and accused Ruth of being a witch! The injured girl told the council leaders that Ruth lured her into the woods to kill her and cook her body in a stew!

"The other girls added their malicious lies. One said she had seen Ruth catch a bat and drink its blood like wine! The third girl said nothing. She just stared into space, pretending to be possessed by Ruth's spirit.

"The town was in an uproar! A witch among them! They had to get rid of her! Without a question, Ruth was put in jail. A makeshift court was created just for her trial. But there was no real trial. The town was looking for someone to pin the blame on. They were all convinced that it was Ruth who had come in the night and moved their furniture and put out their fires. It never occurred to any of

them that it might be the work of the three accusers.

"The so-called trial lasted six days. Each day, the judge would ask Ruth to admit to being a witch and to seek the town's forgiveness. But each day, the old woman would stare at the judge with a cold, haughty glance and spit right in his face.

"By the sixth day, the judge had had enough. He told the woman to stand and face the court.

"'Ruth Orden,' the judge said sternly, 'I sentence you to death. You will be taken to the highest hill in town and there, heavy boulders will be placed on you until the evil is squeezed from your body and you die.'"

Dr. Holt looked straight at Melinda Singer. "Do you know who the girl was who said Ruth was a witch?" he asked her.

The girl shook her head quietly.

"Her name was Belinda Singer—and she was your great-great-great-grandmother! Actually more like your great-great-great-great-great-great-grandmother."

Melinda shook with fear. But the doctor didn't end his story there.

The doctor looked straight at Jeffrey Mi-

chaels. "Belinda's friend, the one who made up the story about the bat, was your distant great-great-grandmother, Carolyn Michaels."

Daniel Adams could hold his peace no longer. "But what about me?" Daniel asked the doctor, his voice cracking with panic. "Am I related to the third girl?"

"No, Daniel, you're not," the doctor said. "Your relative was Nathan Adams. He was the judge who sentenced Ruth to death!"

The children and their parents all stared at Dr. Holt in horror.

"Was Ruth really a witch?" Mrs. Adams asked frightfully.

"I doubt it very much," Dr. Holt replied thoughtfully. "Still, she died a terribly painful death, and she came back last night to get her revenge on the descendants of the people involved in her death."

Everyone in the room had the same question on his or her mind. Yet no one could bear to ask it. Finally Mrs. Adams could hold her curiosity no more.

"How did Ruth die?" she asked almost in a whisper.

Dr. Holt's face grew white. The thought of the torture the poor woman must have en-

dured frightened him. "It happened on the dawn of October twenty-second, at the top of the big hill—you know the one, just at the corner of Elm and Chestnut streets. Everyone from the town was there—even though it was cold and damp and very early. Belinda, Carolyn, and Charlotte were standing in the front of the crowd. Beside them was a large wooden wheel.

"It was hard for the old woman to walk up the hill. She wasn't very strong to begin with, and her legs were shackled—though it was doubtful the old woman would make a run for it. Still, they made her climb that hill, bound like an animal. When they reached the top of the hill, Ruth turned and faced the hostile crowd. She didn't make a sound as she was tied to the rim of the giant wheel with thick, sturdy ropes.

"'Have you anything to say?' Judge Adams asked Ruth.

"But the old woman just stared at the three girls with pleading eyes. She was giving them the chance to free her, to tell the truth about that night. But Belinda just shouted, 'The witch must die,' and laughed a cool, heartless laugh.

"The minister prayed for Ruth's soul, and then with a mighty push from the executioner, the wheel was rolled down a steep hill. As the wheel rolled down the hill, Ruth's bones were crushed by the wheel's weight. She was rolled feetfirst, so she could feel the pain of her breaking bones and crushed organs until the wheel turned over her skull, smashing it into pieces.

"After Ruth died, the girls were smart enough to put an end to the Haunting Club. After a while, people forgot about Ruth. But Ruth never forgot about the three lying girls and the judge that sentenced her to death. Each night, for the rest of their lives, all four were haunted by horrible dreams of hanging, burning, and crushing. Ruth could have made the dreams so horrible that they would have killed her victims. But she chose instead to have the dreams haunt them over and over again—a much more vicious punishment! So in a way, you three are lucky. Ruth tried to kill you all with dreams, but she didn't succeed. Now she is gone from your lives forever!"

"But wait!" Melinda said. "Who was the third girl in the Haunting Club?"

Dr. Holt took a deep breath and sighed.

"Her name was Charlotte Holt. She was *my* great-great-great-great-grandmother."

The silence in the room was broken by Melinda Singer's father. "What a load of hog-wash," he said, staring at the doctor. "Witchcraft, indeed. This is a fine story, Doctor, but I came here to find out what happened to my daughter. I didn't come here to listen to some tale. There's no such thing as witches and no one has ever died of a bad dream. . . ."

His speech was cut short as Nurse Harrigan, Dr. Holt's assistant, burst through the door, her face pale and her cheeks stained with tears. "Dr. Holt, come quick," she said. "You're needed at home. Your daughter, Amy, has been in a terrible accident. They say it looks as though she was run over by some sort of wheel. . . ."



THE CRAZED CAMPER

“Well, Jonathan, you’re all packed,” Mrs. Harris said to her son as she slammed the lid of the large black camp trunk. “We’ll have Dad load this trunk into the car tonight. Then we can set out for Camp Clear Lake first thing in the morning.”

Jonathan opened his mouth to complain but thought better of it and kept still. He knew that it would do no good. His parents wanted him to go to camp, and there was no

way out of it.

Mrs. Harris noticed the worried expression on her son's face, and said, "Johnny, we've been through this a hundred times. "I'm sure you'll like Camp Clear Lake. You'll make new friends, you'll learn new sports, and before you know it, the summer will be over."

If only he could stay home. Something kept telling him that spending a summer at Camp Clear Lake would be a big mistake.

Jonathan and his parents set out early the next morning for Camp Clear Lake. They had only been driving for a half hour when dark clouds began to roll in. Thunder clapped loudly in the distance and flashes of lightning began to cut the sky. But Mr. Harris drove on.

Then it began to rain—large, threatening drops. Faster and faster they fell, forming a sheet. Mr. Harris slowed down some as he continued toward the camp.

As they got closer to Camp Clear Lake, Jonathan's parents grew more and more excited as Jonathan felt sicker and sicker. He had had an uncomfortable feeling for several weeks, ever since the camp director had come

to the house and showed him pictures of the camp. Now that feeling was worse.

Finally, the rain began to let up. They drove past a wooden sign at the side of the road that told them they had one mile to go. Minutes later, they pulled into Camp Clear Lake.

"Isn't this beautiful?" sighed Jonathan's mother. But Jonathan couldn't see anything wonderful about the drenched campground.

"I wish I were going to camp myself," said his father. Jonathan said nothing.

The three of them had to walk along a path through the woods to get to Bunk Six. To Jonathan, the dark woods seemed to be hiding deep, dark secrets. He longed for his small, fenced-in backyard at home.

The wind, too, felt threatening to Jonathan. It seemed to be howling a desperate warning: "Don't stay... don't stay..."

Jonathan put his hands over his ears, trying to block out the frightening message. But the woods just seemed to get darker, and the sound seemed to get louder: "Don't stay... don't stay..."

"What a refreshing breeze," said Mrs. Harris as they neared Bunk Six.

"Welcome to Bunk Six," said a smiling counselor from the porch. "I'm Chip, and you must be Jonathan. You can go right inside—the rest of the boys are already here."

Jonathan hesitantly said good-bye to his parents. As he hugged his mother, the howling murmur of the wind grew louder and louder: "Don't stay... don't stay..." He grabbed his father's arm, silently begging him to take him away from this place with thick, ominous secrets and a wind with a haunting voice. But seconds later, his parents were gone, and Jonathan, alone, went into the bunkhouse.

The inside wasn't much better than the outside. Jonathan didn't like the looks of the cold metal bed with its stained, lumpy mattress. And he wasn't thrilled with the cracked toilet and rusty sink in the bathroom.

But Jonathan felt most uncomfortable watching two bigger boys playing cards in the far corner of the bunkhouse. They weren't just big—they were huge! Both boys were at least a head taller and twenty pounds heavier than any of the other boys. Their arms were bulging with muscles, and their feet were almost double the size of Jonathan's. Jonathan

couldn't be sure, but he thought the brawnier of the two was sneering at him through his small, ice-blue eyes. Jonathan felt a prickly shiver run through his spine and quickly looked away.

"Is the little wimp unhappy?" One of the giants taunted. Later, Jonathan found out his name was Arnold. Karl, the other one, said, "If you think you want to cry now, wait until you've been here awhile." His sinister grin sent an icy chill through Jonathan's bones.

Arnold then said, "We don't like being around crybabies, so you'd better stay out of our way!" Jonathan had a feeling that it wouldn't be easy. They sure seemed to have a lot to say to crybabies. . . . He stopped himself in mid-thought. "I will *not* be a crybaby," he promised himself.

By the next morning, the rain had stopped. After they had finished eating their tasteless breakfast in the mess hall, Chip announced, "C'mon, boys! Put on your swimming trunks. It's time to head to the lake for swimming tests."

The boys quickly changed, grabbed their towels, and headed toward the lake. Jonathan

followed along reluctantly. "Don't stay. . . don't stay. . .," the wind howled. How could his parents have left him here? He dreaded the moment when Karl and Arnold would find out that he was afraid to put his head underwater.

When they reached the waterfront, Jonathan's heart was pounding with fear. He looked into Clear Lake—but it was far from clear! The lake was really a manmade hole filled with murky, muddy water.

The boys walked onto the dock, where each one waited his turn. Karl dove in first. He was told to swim the length of the dock four times—two lengths of crawl, one of breaststroke, and one of sidestroke. He did it easily, and was finished in no time. Then Arnold dove in. His thick, hairy arms cut smoothly through the brown sludge.

When they were finished, the two bullies stayed in the water, watching their bunkmates swim. When Jonathan's turn came, they snickered—just loudly enough for Jonathan to hear, but not so loudly for Chip and the swimming instructor.

Jonathan held his nose and jumped in. Keeping his head above the water, he swam

uncertainly to the end of the dock. He tried to concentrate on his stroke, but all he could think about was the constant moaning of the wind: "Don't stay... don't stay..."

It seemed like hours before he reached the end of the dock. When he finally did, he started to turn to go back. But something forced his head under the water. Opening his eyes in the cloudy water, Jonathan could barely make out the outline of a heavy foot pressed against his face. Terrified, he kicked and splashed, trying to reach the surface.

But none of his struggling would raise his body. Without thinking, Jonathan opened his mouth to gasp for air. Instead, his lungs filled with brown, murky water. He felt his arms and legs go limp. Then he blacked out.

The next thing Jonathan knew, he was being dragged onto the dock by Chip and the swimming instructor. "You are one lucky camper," Chip was saying to him. "If Karl hadn't noticed that you had gone under, you might not be here!"

Jonathan glared at Karl. He knew that it had been Karl's foot that had held him underwater. Jonathan opened his mouth to speak, but Arnold grabbed his arm so tightly that he

closed it.

"If you ever tell anyone about this, you'll be sorry, crybaby," warned Arnold. "Open your mouth and we'll get you good! You'll have to sleep with one eye open, and have eyes in the back of your head. No, I think you'd better keep quiet, Johnny boy," he whispered viciously.

That was all Jonathan needed to hear. He knew Arnold wasn't kidding. If he ever told on Karl, there would be no more rescues. No, Jonathan would never tell on Karl or Arnold.

But as the days rolled on, Jonathan became more and more frustrated. He had to put up with merciless taunting, short-sheeted beds, not-so-accidental jabs to his side, having his food tray tipped over in the mess hall, tripping over Arnold's oversize feet, and many other cruel tricks.

He hardly got any sleep for fear he'd be attacked in the middle of the night. He didn't eat much, either, for fear there would be spiders in his food.

Finally, he had so much anger built up inside that Jonathan felt he had to risk telling someone about the pain Karl and Arnold were inflicting upon him. But when he finally

got up the courage to approach the camp director, Jonathan froze. He could see and hear nothing else but Arnold's thin, red lips repeating, "We'll get you good. . . we'll get you good. . . ."

He became more fearful than ever—so fearful, that he stopped talking altogether. He felt it would be much easier to keep silent than to risk having the truth slip out in anger. So, from that day on, Jonathan never uttered another word.

The other campers thought Jonathan odd and began to call him "the dummy" behind his back. Chip sent him to the camp nurse, who asked him hundreds of questions, but Jonathan never replied with anything other than a vacant stare.

Of course, Arnold and Karl delighted in Jonathan's self-imposed silence. "That's right, crybaby," Karl would hiss. "Keep those lips zipped. We'll never stop watching you!"

One week before the end of camp, Joel, the pioneering counselor, took the boys in Bunk Six on an overnight hiking trip. With tents, sleeping bags, knapsacks, and plenty of food, the boys set off for Forbidden Trail, in the woods behind Camp Clear Lake. The boys

were excited about having the chance to be in the woods—toasting marshmallows around a campfire and sleeping under the stars. But Jonathan, as usual, said nothing. He would only be happy as long as Karl and Arnold stayed away from him.

As the boys marched down the trail singing:

*"I knew a man named Michael Finnegan,
He had whiskers on his chinnigan,
Along came the wind and blew them in again.
Poor old Michael Finnegan. Begin again . . ."*

Jonathan followed quietly at the back of the line. He was oblivious to their singing, which was drowned out by the sound of the whistling trees, warning: "Don't stay . . . don't stay . . . !"

The boys arrived at a campsite just before sunset. They began to pitch the tents, build a latrine, and dig a pit for the campfire, using their pioneering skills.

"So far, so good," Jonathan thought to himself, after pitching his tent as far from Karl and Arnold's tents as was possible. Maybe he wouldn't have to deal with them on this overnight, after all.

Jonathan's luck didn't last long, though. After the tents were up, Joel called the boys together and split them into groups to collect firewood. "To make it more fun," he said, "we'll make a contest out of it. Whichever group collects the most wood wins. Steve, Howard, and Pete—you're group one. Karl Arnold, and Jonathan—you're group two." Jonathan didn't hear Joel announce the rest of the groups. "Karl, Arnold, and Jonathan" was still ringing in his ears! Alone in the woods with Karl and Arnold! Jonathan was petrified!

"C'mon, Johnny boy," said Karl. "Maybe I'll have to save your life again! You'd like that, wouldn't you?" Arnold snickered. Jonathan said nothing.

Jonathan, shaking and trembling, followed Karl and Arnold into the deep, dark woods. And that was the last that anyone ever saw of Jonathan.

No one knows what happened in the woods that night. All that the campers and counselors know for sure was that about two hours later, Karl and Arnold returned to the campsite without Jonathan. When asked where he was, neither boy answered. In fact,

neither Karl nor Arnold ever spoke another word.

The counselors, the police, and even a private investigator hired by Jonathan's parents thoroughly searched the woods, but there was no trace of Jonathan.

Although Jonathan was never seen again, many people claim to have heard him. To this day, it is said that his angry ghost, no longer afraid of anyone or anything, roams around the woods that surround campgrounds all over the northeastern United States. And, if you listen carefully on a dark night, you will be able to hear Jonathan's hoarse voice calling, "I will get my revenge! I will get my revenge! I will get my revenge!"

But until he finds Karl or Arnold, it is said that Jonathan will take his revenge on any camper that dares to walk through the overgrown forests. No one knows what evil is held by Jonathan's revenge, or of what horrors his spirit is capable, because no camper who has ever heard Jonathan's continuous screams has ever uttered another word.

No camper is safe from the vicious ghost of the crazed camper.

"I WILL GET MY REVENGE!"



THE REFLECTION

"The defendant will please rise."

Fear rose through Kip Jungers's spine as he stood and faced the judge. This was it. Would the judge decide he was guilty? Kip studied Judge Parsons's face. The old judge looked tired, hungry, and cranky. But would he let that affect his verdict? Kip sure hoped not. He stared at the judge and pleaded for mercy with his soulful brown eyes.

"Kip Jungers," the judge said, deliber-

ately avoiding the gaze of the accused man. "I find you guilty of the murder of Alice Black. I sentence you to death by hanging on the fifteenth of this month." With that, the judge turned around and headed into his chambers.

Kip Jungers broke into hysterics. "But I'm innocent," he shouted at the judge's back. "I didn't do nuthin'! I've been framed." But the judge never even turned around.

Truth was, Judge Parsons was a bit ashamed to face Kip Jungers. He wasn't at all sure that Kip was the murderer. But the case had dragged on for weeks, and already the mayor of their small town was reminding him that the judge's chances in next month's elections could be ruined unless Alice Black's murderer was convicted soon. Judge Parsons couldn't risk his whole career on the fate of one man. Besides, enough of the evidence pointed to Kip to make the conviction stick, so no one would question his decision. Anyway, the foolish old coot had waived his right to a trial by jury, so he had taken his chances by putting his fate in one man's hands—and that one man's hands had dealt him death.

Kip was pretty old, anyway, the judge consoled himself on his way home to supper.

He probably wouldn't have lived much longer.

On the fifteenth of May, Kip Jungers was hanged. Even as the hangman tied the noose around the man's neck, Kip cried out for justice and mercy. "Can't you see this is a mistake?" he cried to the small crowd that had gathered outside the prison walls. But no one said a word, and within a few seconds, the hangman kicked open the trapdoor from under Kip. The rope closed tight around Kip's thick neck. He let out a final scream, his eyes bulged, and then his hand twitched as the last bit of life fled from his body. Then the hangman cut Kip's swinging, lifeless body from the rope, and sent it to the undertaker.

For a week or so, Judge Parsons felt a knot in his stomach whenever he thought of Kip Jungers. But with compliments from the mayor for speeding up the trial and the polls showing he was a shoo-in for reelection, Judge Parsons started to relax. His life fell back into its normal pattern—until the night of June 10.

On that night, Judge Parsons spent the evening reading the newspaper, as usual. Then he washed his face, brushed his teeth, kissed his wife Mamie good night, and went

to bed. No sooner had he shut his eyes than he felt a cold wind blow through the room. He awoke with a start. He looked over at the windows, but they were tightly shut! He glanced at Mamie, but she was sleeping soundly. He pulled the covers tightly around himself. Then he was shaken by a cold, angry voice—the voice of the murdered woman, Alice Black.

“Marley Parsons, don’t you dare go to sleep. I don’t know how you can sleep with the murder of Kip Jungers on your conscience. You know full well that he wasn’t my murderer. But you let him die, anyway, just to save your own hide. You’re an evil man, Marley Parsons!”

Judge Parsons turned toward the voice, afraid of what he might see. And then he saw her. She was dressed just as she had been when they had found her body outside the inn—in a thin white dress. But she had been stabbed so many times that you could barely make out that the dress had ever been white, it was so covered with dried blood. Her face was pale with dark circles under her blue eyes. But for the most part, Alice Black looked pretty much in death like she had in life.

"It was Clive Foley that killed me, Marley Parsons. And if you want to save your soul, you'll hunt him down, admit your mistake, and make him pay for what he done to me! If you don't, the punishment will be too much for you to bear! And it won't end until your death!"

With that, Alice's ghost disappeared, leaving Judge Parsons shaking and his night-clothes soaked with perspiration. He sat in the dark thinking about the ghost's threat. She was right, of course, but he couldn't admit his mistake just now—not until after the election. Once he was reelected he would make good on the ghost's request.

But knowing that Clive was the murderer weighed heavily on Judge Parsons's conscience. He had to turn away whenever he saw Clive walk down the street. He couldn't bear to look at the man's thick blond hair or into his cool green eyes. For the first time, Judge Parsons could see all that was evil in the world just by looking at Clive's hard, chiseled face. But Clive was keeping to himself, and no one seemed in any immediate danger. Alice Black's ghost hadn't come to bother the judge again, so he slowly began to relax.

One night, two weeks later, Judge Parsons was awakened by screaming just outside his window. He ran outside to his neighbor Abel Mattias, who was standing over the blood-soaked body of his wife Elvira. At least he *thought* it was Elvira. She had been stabbed several times and was barely recognizable.

"I'll kill the man who did this to my Elvira!" Abel cried. "My darling Elvira!" The sobbing man lifted his dead wife's head and cradled it in his lap. A bit of blood splashed on Judge Parsons's nightshirt.

Judge Parsons put his hand over his mouth and ran into his house. It wasn't the blood that made him ill, it was the guilt. No one had to tell him that this violence was the work of Clive Foley. It was all Judge Parsons's fault. If only he had listened to Alice's spirit, Clive would have been behind bars that night. The thought of what he had done made him sick to his stomach.

Judge Parsons sat shaking on his bed. He looked lovingly at Mamie. "Lucky woman," he thought. "She'll sleep through anything. Well, let her sleep. There's time enough to tell her what happened in the morning."

As Judge Parsons tried to fall back to

sleep he soothed his guilty conscience with thoughts of false righteousness. "There's no proof it was Clive Foley who killed Elvira. In fact, there's no proof he killed anyone, and no one could prove I knew about it, even if he did. After all, who in their right mind would believe I'd seen a ghost!" With that, he shut his eyes.

But he never got to sleep. Marley Parsons wasn't really surprised when once again he felt an icy wind sweep through the bedroom. His heart didn't even skip a beat when he opened his eyes to see Alice Black's blood-stained ghost. But he almost passed into the next world himself when he saw Elvira's ghost staring at him, too.

"You will pay for this," Elvira snapped at Marley Parsons. "You know Clive Foley did this to me in one of his drunken rages. You knew he was a madman, but you couldn't risk your precious career. Instead you risked my life—me, the wife of your best friend and the one who held your wife's hand when your only son was born. Well, the actions of Clive Foley will be on your head for eternity, Marley Parsons. Your guilt will be as plain as the nose on your face. You're as guilty as he!"

With that, both spirits disappeared. Judge Parsons tried to ignore her threat and fall asleep. But his eyes stayed wide open.

That morning he got out of bed before Mamie and as always went into the bathroom to splash some cool water on his face. He looked up at the mirror. What he saw made Marley Parsons's heart pound so hard he thought it would burst through his chest. There in the mirror, staring back at him with a devilish grin, was the face of Clive Foley. Judge Parsons turned around, hoping to see Clive behind him playing a joke, but no one was there! He looked back at the mirror, but it was still there—Clive Foley's face on Marley Parsons's body.

"I must get out of here," Marley Parsons thought in a panic. "They will think I am him. They will convict me of a murder I never committed."

Without a thought of his career, his wife, or his guilt, Marley Parsons threw on a pair of old slacks, a shirt, and shoes and ran out his front door. He never looked back as he ran to the train station and caught the first train.

Once he was on the train, Marley Parsons threw out all of his identification. He became

a man without a name, without a home, and without a past. He went from town to town and took on odd jobs. He never stayed in one place for very long. He was sure that if he did someone would see him, mistake him for Clive Foley, and send him home to hang for a crime he did not commit. He could never run far enough to feel safe, because the reflection in the mirror stayed with him wherever he ran.

The ghosts of Alice Black, Kip Jungers, and Elvira Mattias had the last laugh on Judge Marley Parsons. For they alone knew that Marley had no real reason to run. When people stared at the old, dirty, disheveled hobo, they saw the face of Marley Parsons. It was only the guilty judge who saw the murderer's face in the mirror!



THE SHIP IN THE BOTTLE

Swish, swish, swish. Joey Bendel loved the sound of the water as it flowed over the clean white rocks in the creek. Ever since Joey and his parents had moved to the green house on Dover Road, he had loved playing near the creek, pretending he was a pirate, collecting treasures from far-off places.

There were terrific treasures in the creek. Like the smooth, polished stones that washed up on the mud along the creek. Or the tin cans that floated above the water. Joey's older

sister Lois called the cans pollution, but Joey thought they were something special. There was the time Joey found the silver keychain caught in the rocks. That was the best treasure of all. But Joey's mother never let him keep the things he'd found—she called his treasures junk!

One afternoon Joey was sitting by the creek, waiting for something new to drift past. It was getting dark, and Joey knew it was almost time to go inside for supper. But he wanted to wait just a little longer just in case a really terrific treasure came around the bend. He was just about to give up when he saw it—a clean, clear bottle with a white label with tiny writing. It was a bottle so shiny it picked up the last rays of sunlight and shined them right into the boy's eyes, blinding him for just a second.

Joey took the bottle out of the cool water. When he looked at it he became very excited. There in the bottle was a tiny pirate ship with tiny pirate dolls, just like the ones Joey dreamed of. He was just about to open the bottle and try to free the ship when his mother called from the back door.

"Joey...Joey!" she called. "Come on in

for supper."

The young boy walked toward the house. When he got there he ran up to his room and hid the bottle under his bed. He didn't want his mother to make him throw out this treasure! Then he ran downstairs for supper.

That night before he went to bed, Joey pulled out the bottle and opened the cap. He tried to pull the ship out of the bottle, but it wouldn't budge. Finally, the boy's eyes grew heavy and he started to yawn.

"I'll try this again tomorrow," he thought as he put the bottle on the night table.

That night, Joey had a nightmare. He dreamed he was at sea in a mighty pirate ship. The ship was riding in icy, choppy waters. The boat rocked so much, Joey felt sick to his stomach. He wanted to rest, but the pirate captain wouldn't let him stop working.

"Mop that deck," the pirate captain barked.

"Please, let me rest. Let me rest," Joey begged.

"Shiver me timbers, you lazy land lubber," the pirate captain snarled. "You asked to serve on this pirate ship. Now, act like a buccaneer, boy!" Joey jumped in shock as he

heard the crack of a whip coming down on his back. THWACK!

"Ayyyyyye!!" Joey cried out in pain. The captain just laughed. "Now, get to work, you. The sun's up! Daylight is no time to rest!"

The sun? Joey looked out the window. It was daylight. The little boy pinched his own arm.

"Ouch!" he cried. That hurt. This was no dream. He really was on a pirate ship!

"Where am I?" Joey asked an older boy who was mopping the deck of the ship.

"On the *Witch's Ship*," the boy answered without looking up. "Remember that ship you found yesterday?"

"But that can't be this ship," Joey answered. "That ship was a tiny ship in a bottle."

"Take a look around," the older boy said, laughing. "You are one of *us* now!"

Joey looked up. Through a clear, glass sky he could see a giant bed—*his* bed—with his teddy bear now bigger than Joey himself! He noticed that the huge red shelves now held the largest books he had ever seen.

"Hey," Joey shouted, panicking, "this is my room!"

"Not anymore," the older boy said. "This ship is your home for the rest of eternity."

THWACK! A whip snapped in front of Joey's face. "Back to work, you," snapped the captain. "I'll not have the new one lazing around!"

Joey picked up his mop and pushed it back and forth across the deck.

"Don't mind him," a tiny voice piped up behind Joey. It came from a tiny girl dressed in a black suit with a bright green sash. "He's been like that for a hundred and fifty years. I should know—I was his first prisoner! He's been angry ever since the witch cursed his ship."

"Cursed his ship?" Joey asked the girl. "Why?"

"Well, you see, back in the early 1800s, the captain was quite a successful pirate. He and his crew were feared over all the seven seas. They would overrun ships carrying jewels and spices from the Orient and steal all the goods. Then they would make all the sailors walk the plank and jump to their deaths."

"Wow!" Joey exclaimed. "Just like on TV!"

The girl ignored him and continued her story. "Well, after a while, the money they

made from the stolen jewels and spices wasn't enough for the captain and his crew. So they began to kidnap young women and sell them into slavery. They made quite a profit. Everything was going along fine until they kidnapped a young girl from a tiny island off the coast of Asia and kept her as a slave. You see, this particular child was the only child of a witch.

"When the witch discovered her child had been taken away by pirates, she angrily vowed revenge! She searched the world over for the pirate ship but never found it. When the witch was on her deathbed, she cast a spell and doomed the pirate captain to roam the earth forever, trapped in a tiny bottle."

"That's some story," Joey said quietly. "But what does it have to do with me?"

"Why, you found the bottle," the girl said.

"So what?" Joey whined. He was tired and wanted desperately to be back in his own bed.

"All these other kids found the bottle at one time or another," the girl explained. "And just like you, they didn't read the warning. Now we're all trapped here inside this bottle forever and ever!"

Joey started to cry. "Warning! What warn-

ing?" he sobbed.

"The warning on the bottle," the girl said, as if Joey were being ridiculous. "The witch made sure anyone who opened the bottle would suffer the same fate as the pirate! Didn't you read the label on the bottle? The one that says, 'All those who open this are doomed!'"

Joey looked at her with wet eyes. "The words were much too tiny to read," he said softly, stifling a sob. Then he added, "But you said 'they'. How did *you* get here?"

"That's the worst part of all," the girl said. "I am the witch's daughter. The captain kept me on board the whole time. That is why my mother never found me. Unknowingly, she sentenced me to as horrid a fate as my kidnapper!"

Just then, the mighty ship tossed with great force. Joey and his new friend were thrown from side to side, crashing into the hard wooden deck. They looked up to see a giant hand grip the bottle.

Joey could hear his mother's voice. It seemed very far away.

"Just wait until I find that boy," she was saying. "I told him I'll have no more junk in

my house! I'll just take this back out to the creek where he found it."

With that, she picked up the bottle and carried it outside.

"MOM! MOMMY! MOMMY! PLEASE HELP ME!" Joey cried from inside the bottle. "Don't let me float away!"

"She can't help you now, boy," the pirate captain laughed. "We've set sail for a new land. "You'll never see her again! Now, go down to the galley and fix me something to eat."

As days turned into weeks, and weeks turned into months, the bottle drifted further down the creek. Joey became just another one of the hundreds of children who would forever be prisoners on the *Witch's Ship*. They had come from different lands and different times, but they all had one thing in common. Together they would travel the world, never growing older, forever trapped in a clear, glass prison. Every day was exactly the same—mop the floors, cook the meals, raise the sails, shine the captain's shoes.

Then, one day, a little boy found a clear glass bottle floating along in the river behind his house. He picked up the bottle, and saw a tiny pirate ship inside. . . .



THE WEDDING FEAST

"It's unbelievable, Doctor," Nurse Gray, the newest nurse on Ward 3 of the Memorial Mental Hospital, said to the chief psychiatrist. "Every day for the past six months I have walked into Mrs. Jones's room, brought her breakfast, cleaned her, and walked her around the grounds. You would think she would know who I am by now, and maybe even look forward to seeing me. After all, I am the only visitor she has. And yet, every day when I walk into her room, she just stares

at me with those glassy eyes and lets out one of those bloodcurdling screams. Something must really be eating away at her. I was just wondering, Doctor, is it me? Is there something I can do?"

The doctor lit his pipe and leaned back in his chair. "Oh, she's been like that ever since they brought her in here about thirty years ago."

The nurse's eyes opened wide with shock. "Thirty years!" she exclaimed. "What possibly could happen to a person to make her scream for thirty years?"

The doctor stared out the window as he began to recall the horrid story.

"It started during World War II, just before her first husband Jack Marks went into the army," the doctor explained slowly. Jack met Sylvia the summer before he was shipped out to Japan. They had a whirlwind courtship—couldn't have known each other more than three months when they got married. That's what a lot of young folks did back then—married each other really quickly on account of the war and everything.

"Well, Jack was shipped out just after their honeymoon, and Sylvia was left here.

She was really pretty back then—bright red hair and the greenest eyes you've ever seen. She kept to herself a lot—I guess she missed Jack—and was lonely. Then Sylvia met a man named Orville Jones at a mixer on the Fourth of July. She was helping out by serving punch to some of the men who were home on leave. Orville was a salesman, just passing through, but he came to the party, anyway. Orville and Sylvia took a liking to each other, so he stayed around. The two took to keeping each other company. They were just friends, of course, but they became extremely close.

"Weeks and then months passed, and finally Jack came home. I remember the night at the docks. He hurried off the boat and looked for Sylvia. She wasn't anywhere in sight. So he ran to the tiny apartment he and Sylvia had rented right after they were married. He couldn't wait to see his bride and to taste a home-cooked meal.

"Well, Sylvia was there, all right, just as he had expected. And there was a hot dinner cooking on the stove. But it wasn't for Jack. It was for Orville, who was sitting in Jack's seat at the kitchen table.

"Well, as you can imagine, Jack flew into

quite a rage. He threw Orville out of the house and told Sylvia she was never to see him again. Sylvia tried to tell Jack that Orville was just a friend, someone to keep company with while Jack had been in Japan. But, she didn't sound very convincing.

"Still, Jack and Sylvia tried to reestablish their life together. Jack took a job working construction on a skyscraper being built in the city. It was big news around here—the first building to go above twenty stories. Jack was really lucky to get the work.

"Sylvia tried to be the loving wife she once was, but she just couldn't forget Orville.

"Finally, Sylvia asked Jack for a divorce. She confessed that she and Orville were in love with each other and wanted to get married.

"Jack was furious, and told Sylvia that a divorce was out of the question. He said that if she ever saw Orville again, it would be the last time that Orville would see anyone!

"Sylvia got pretty desperate at this point. She wasn't about to have her life ruined by a mistake she'd made in haste because of the war. So the next day, she and Orville hatched a foolproof plan to get rid of Jack.

"There was a man named Chuck Masters who worked on the site with Jack. Chuck was an ex-convict with no conscience. Sylvia paid Chuck Masters a thousand dollars to loosen the cables on the elevator Jack took down from the top of the building. It was a beautiful plan—an accident on a construction site—who could argue with that? It happened all the time. Everyone knew that construction work was risky.

"On the day of the accident, Sylvia was careful to be seen at the market, at the laundromat, and at Parker's Department Store. She had lots of witnesses who could testify that she was nowhere near the construction site when Jack fell to his death.

"The plan went exactly as Sylvia and Orville expected. The five o'clock work whistle blew, and Jack got in the elevator. The elevator car started its slow descent down the frame of the building. I guess Jack started to unwind after a long day of hard physical labor, and probably was looking forward to getting home to Sylvia. But as the elevator reached the thirteenth floor, the lights flashed like a signal, and then they clicked off. Jack was thrown against the wall of the car as the ele-

vator fell at lightning speed to the hard cement floor below. Some witnesses said they could hear Jack's ear-piercing screams coming from the falling elevator as he realized he was about to die a horrible death. Others say he was dead right away; it was just the sound of the wind screeching as the elevator fell. The men who found the body said the elevator car hit the ground with such impact that Jack's body was crushed and mutilated beyond recognition.

"Sylvia was truly a brilliant actress. She put on her widow's weeds and dramatically mourned Jack's death. She convinced everyone, including the sheriff, that this *terrible* accident had taken away the only man she had ever loved. Of course, Orville never challenged her story, and the only other man who knew her secret, Chuck Masters, took the money and ran. No one ever heard from him again.

"Eventually, Sylvia and Orville started courting again—after a respectable mourning period. No one was too surprised when they got engaged at the end of that year. 'She's such a young thing, she deserves a fresh start,' people said.

"The wedding was the event of the season. Sylvia had it catered by a big catering firm from New York City. She hired an eight-piece band. She had Irish lace tablecloths and tulips imported from Holland for the tables. She had plenty of money to spend on the wedding—she'd made a bundle in insurance from Jack's 'accident.'

"Now, everything at the wedding started out normal enough. The minister declared Sylvia and Orville man and wife, Orville kissed the bride, and everyone threw rice at the happy couple. It wasn't until the reception that strange things happened.

"Everyone was seated at the tables. When the band began playing their song, Sylvia and Orville got up to dance. But halfway through the song, the band switched to 'Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree with Anyone Else But Me.' Sylvia's face turned as white as her dress—that was the special song she had shared with Jack. She had *specifically* asked the band not to play it! Her knees buckled, and Orville had to help her to her seat.

"Now, I know what you're thinking. It could have been a coincidence—wedding bands make mistakes all the time. But other

bizarre things started happening, as well. Just as Sylvia turned to sit down, the mirrored wall behind her chair came crashing down, just missing Sylvia's head. But the shattered glass sliced Orville's finger, and the blood left a bright red mark on Sylvia's white wedding dress.

"Before Sylvia could reach for water to wash away the stain, the waiter came to her table and placed a platter on the table. Slowly the waiter lifted the silver lid. There, instead of the roast beef, sat JACK'S HEAD! Its eyes were open, and its red lips smiling. The teeth shone bright white as the lips moved in time to the music—without uttering a sound! Sylvia took one look at the singing head and let out a long, penetrating shriek!

"Orville tried to calm her down, but the scream wouldn't stop. She just kept staring at the singing, smiling head.

"Finally, someone called us here at the asylum, and we sent over two orderlies with a straitjacket. We committed her right away.

"For a long time I tried to talk to her, but it took a lot of work to get her story. I tried to find out more about that evening, but every time she got to the part about Jack's singing

head, she just stared that same blank stare and let out that shrill scream that echoes through the halls every day.

"As for Orville, he was killed in a strange accident not long after the wedding. Seems he went into an apartment building to sell some cleaning fluid. But he didn't have any luck. On his way home, he was so depressed he wasn't paying attention to where he was going. He pushed the button to call the elevator so he could go home. When the doors opened, Orville stepped in—into an empty elevator shaft. And he fell fifteen stories to his death.

"If you ask me, he got the more humane sentence. Can you imagine the memories Sylvia has? It is those memories that will keep her screaming until the end of her days!"



THE CRY OF THE CAT

It all started about seventy-five years ago, when old Hattie Johnson was killed on the front porch of her beloved house by rowdy kids out for a night of fun. Fun that turned into terror . . .

Hattie's husband George had built that house for her as a wedding present. It was everything a bride could ask for. It was three stories high, with beautiful hardwood floors and a fireplace in every room. The strong old house represented everything that had ever

mattered to Hattie. Even when her husband died and she became too old to care for the house alone, she couldn't bear to leave it.

The townspeople were disgusted by the old house. They complained about the towering weeds, the chipped paint, and the stench that came from the overflowing trash bins out in front. But mostly they complained about Hattie's thirteen screeching and howling cats.

"I haven't slept in weeks," Mrs. Smith declared at one town meeting. "Someone ought to have that crazy lady and her cats put away!" Everyone in the town agreed. The mayor tried to convince Hattie to move to a rest home in the next town, but she wouldn't budge. "The only way I'll ever leave my house," she told the council, "is in a wooden box!" And after that, Hattie stopped coming to town meetings. Actually, she stopped coming to town. She ate only what she grew in her vegetable garden, and she talked to no one but her cats!

The kids started spreading stories about Hattie.

"I heard she's a witch who skins kids alive and lets her cats nibble their bones," a boy in the schoolyard would say.

Every night, some of the kids would hang around Hattie's house and throw rocks at her windows. "*Hideous Hattie in her haunted house! Hideous Hattie in her haunted house!*" they'd yell over and over until a cat would pounce on them and scratch their faces. Then Hattie would come out to the porch and shout, "Just leave me alone!"

Although the neighbors heard everything, they never did anything to stop the kids' viciousness. Some say they encouraged it, hoping to drive "Batty Hattie" out of the town once and for all. Finally, one night they did. And as Hattie had said, it was in a wooden box.

On that night, the neighbors heard the same crash and high-pitched hiss they heard every night. But no one heard the quiet thud that came next. It seems that when Hattie came out on the porch to catch the trouble-makers, one of the boys threw a rock that hit her in the head. Hattie fell to the ground in a heap.

Several days passed before anyone found Hattie's body. Then, one day, two passersby heard her cats screeching louder than ever. They went up to the house to see what was

wrong. There, lying on the porch, they found poor, dead Hattie—surrounded by at least twenty cats!

The townspeople buried Hattie under the elm tree in her yard alongside her husband. They left the grave unmarked so the house would be easier to sell. The cats, left to fend for themselves, wandered around town searching for food, clanging the lids of trash bins, and knocking over anything in their paths. And every night, they returned to Hattie's house, where they howled until dawn.

Finally the mayor decided to have all the cats put to sleep. Rounding them up was a difficult task, but three weeks later, the last cat had been disposed of.

Over the next few years, two different families moved into Hattie's place, but neither stayed very long. It was said that Hattie's spirit wouldn't allow anyone to live there. Finally, the town council had the house boarded up. It stayed that way until the Murphys moved in.

Mrs. Quate, the real estate agent, told the Murphys that with a little work this "great bargain of a house" could become a real

beauty. She warned them about the old plumbing, the bad wiring, and the leaking roof. But she did *not* mention the stories about Hattie's spirit and her cats. After all, she thought, it all happened so long ago, and besides, everyone knows there's no such things as ghosts—right?

Jack and Sheila Murphy loved their new home. They worked hard to fix it up for themselves and their children, Jennifer and Zack. Zack replaced the shattered windows with shiny new ones, and Sheila gave the outside a fresh coat of white paint. Jack built a playroom for the kids over what had been Hattie's vegetable garden. The Murphy family was happy as could be.

Jennifer was the first one to hear the scratching. It started late one night after everyone was in bed. At first it was only a slight noise, but then it got louder until terrified little Jennifer ran crying into her parents' bedroom.

"Relax, honey," Sheila said, trying to soothe her. "It's only that elm tree scratching against your window." But she let the child stay with them for the rest of the night.

The next night, the scratching was louder, and it was joined with a "tap-tap-tap-tap." This time it was Zack who came running into his parents' room in tears.

"Someone is walking around in the attic," the boy cried.

"Now, Zack, calm down," Jack told his son. "It's probably just a leaky pipe. I'll check on it tomorrow." But the next morning, when Jack went up to the attic, all he found were a few cobwebs and a timid mouse.

It was tough getting the kids to go to bed that next night. Even Sheila and Jack were a little on edge as they crawled into their large four-poster bed. "Where could these noises be coming from?" they wondered.

At around two o'clock in the morning, the Murphys heard, whish, whish, tap-tap-tap-tap, scratch, scratch, tap-tap-tap-tap, whish, whish, SCRATCH. . . . Within seconds, the entire family was huddled together on Jack and Sheila's four-poster bed. The family stayed that way until Sheila went downstairs to start breakfast the next morning.

As Sheila was pouring four glasses of orange juice, she heard a soft purring coming from outside the kitchen door. She opened the

door and found a tiny black kitten with a white star on its forehead. "Oh, you poor angel," she said as she picked up the kitten. "Come in for some milk, you hungry thing!"

As soon as Jennifer and Zack saw the kitten, they fell in love with it. The kitten made them forget the horrible noises they had heard the night before. "I want to name her Hattie," said Jennifer. "Hattie the Cat." Everyone liked the name, but Jack and Sheila found it a little odd. At school that day, Jennifer bragged about Hattie the Cat to her classmates. The other kids were jealous. But not for long.

The following morning, Lisa Smith was late to school because her mother had found a tiny gray kitten on their kitchen doorstep. That same morning, Danny Potter's mother found a white kitten on *their* doorstep, too. And on the morning after that, six more mothers found six more tiny kittens on their doorsteps. By the end of the week, every child in class had a cuddly new kitten to go home to. No one talked about anything except cats!

"Settle down, class," Mrs. Casey said on Friday morning. "Take out your math books. You can talk about the cats at lunch." No

sooner had Mrs. Casey begun explaining the lesson when there was a strange scratching sound at the classroom door. At first, Mrs. Casey ignored it. But then it grew louder and louder. Scratch . . . scratch . . . SCRATCH! Then came a horrible cry, as if someone were being tortured out in the hallway. Mrs. Casey rushed to the door and flung it open. "OOOHHH . . . NOOOOOOO!" she cried. There, poised on the rafters, crouching along the wall, and hanging from the coat hooks she saw hundreds of mean, spitting, snarling cats! The cats saw the open door and ran into the classroom, howling and roaring like wild cougars and lions.

Mrs. Casey quickly gathered up the children and helped them climb through the classroom's first-floor windows. But outside was worse! Cats were everywhere—in the trees, on the swings, and in the parking lot. They ran out to the road and saw cats sprawled on windowsills, benches, and cars! Frightened people were running every which way—trying to escape from the hissing, meowing, scratching cats!

Jennifer spotted her little brother in the crowd and grabbed his hand. Together they

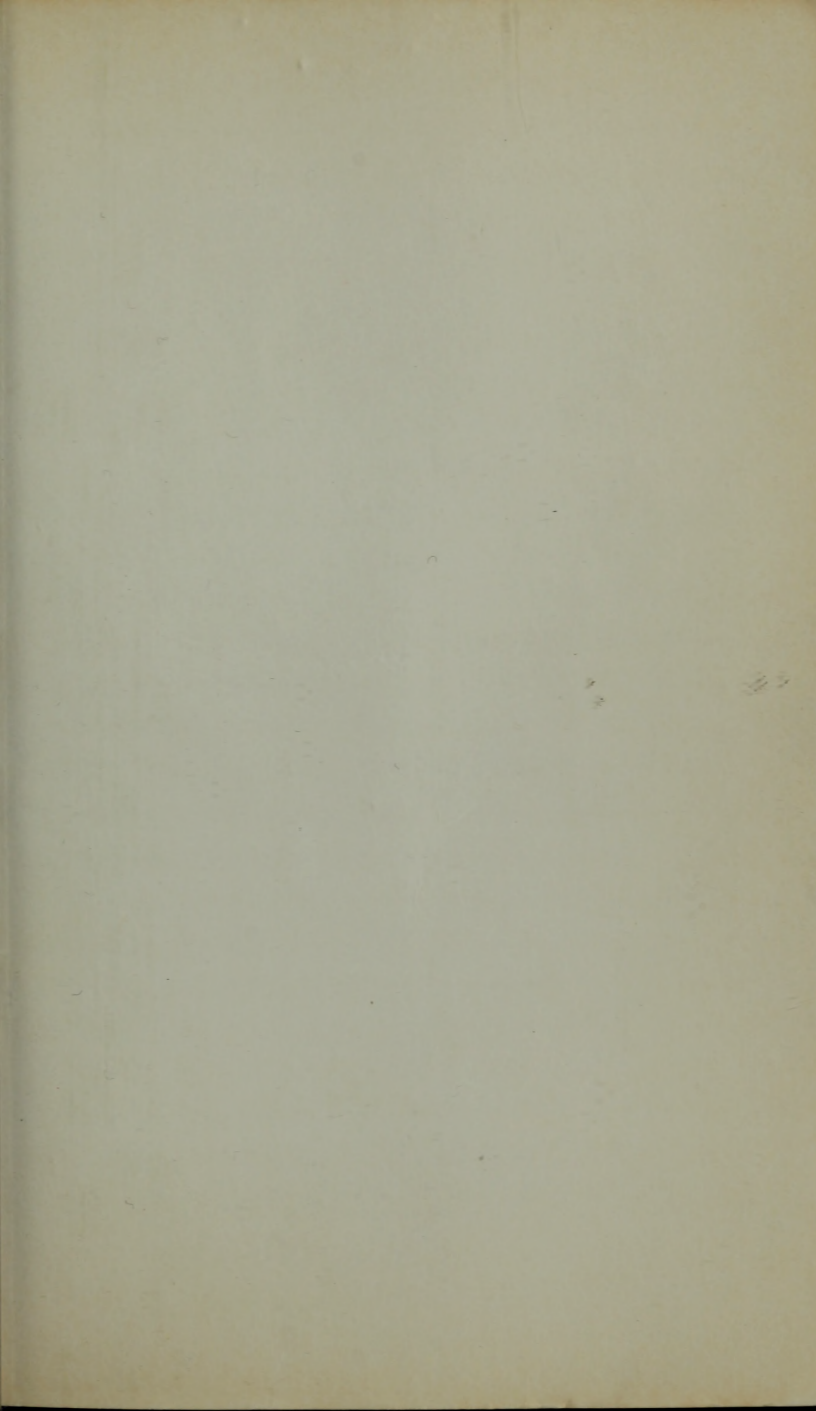
ran home, fending off pouncing cats as they went.

"Thank goodness you're safe," Jack cried from the driveway as he scooped the two children up in his arms. They made their way past the needle-sharp claws that tore at their clothing and faces to the station wagon, where Sheila was waiting. They jumped into the car, slammed the doors, and pulled out into the street. Then, THUMP! A huge black cat leaped menacingly onto their windshield. It had a white star in the center of its forehead just like Hattie the Cat had! It stared right through the glass at Jack and spit. Then a large orange tabby pounced on the roof. Still more cats used their sharp claws to tear away at the tires, while others blocked the road ahead. But nothing could stop Jack. He stepped on the gas and plowed through the sea of white, gray, black, and orange felines, leaving hundreds of cats screaming in anger. Jack drove for hours until the Murphys were far from home. And not one of them looked back.

It took the Murphy family a few years to recover from the shock of that day. But eventually, like the others who had fled, they made

a new life for themselves in a new town and in a new house. Sheila planted another garden, Jack built the kids a new playroom, and the kids made friends at a new school.

Then, one Saturday morning when Zack was eating breakfast in the kitchen, he heard a quiet purring at the back door. When he opened the door, there, at his feet, was a tiny black kitten with a white star on its forehead. . . .



WARNING: Beware of screeching black cats, howling witches, dead men who won't stay dead, and haunted closets filled with floating, staring eyes.



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